

VZCZCXRO7882  
PP RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH  
DE RUEHBK #5584 2550848  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 120848Z SEP 06  
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1552  
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 2417  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JCS WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 005584

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/13/2006  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [TH](#) [BM](#)  
SUBJECT: THAI ARMY CHIEF VISITS BURMA

Classified By: Political Counselor Susan M. Sutton for reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (U) On September 11, Gen. Sondhi Boonyaratkalin led a delegation of 25 Army officers on a three-day visit to Burma. According to the MFA, this is a routine visit that has been in the works since November 2005 when Gen. Sondhi assumed command of the RTA.

¶2. (C) MFA Burma Division Director Kallayana Vipattipumprates said that Sondhi's trip to Burma had been postponed multiple times since planning first began last year. In the interim, according to Kallayana, Sondhi has visited all of the other nations bordering Thailand and most of the other ASEAN member nations. He said Sondhi determined that "it would not look good" for him to complete one full year as Chief of the Army without having visited Burma - a country with which Thailand has many significant security and trans-border issues. Kallayana said that Sondhi's agenda focused on drug trafficking and general matters of border security. He said that this is mainly a "getting acquainted" visit for Sondhi.

¶3. (C) Kallayana said that, Sondhi met with Than Shwe and Maung Aye, but said that little of substance came out of the meeting. Sondhi also met with Gen. Thura Shwe Mann before departing on a "sightseeing" tour of Mandalay. The Thai Ambassador to Burma will host a dinner for Sondhi on September 12, and the guest of honor will be Hla Htay Win, military commander of Rangoon.

¶4. (C) Comment: While the timing of this trip may seem suspiciously close on the heels of two other high-level RTG visits to Burma (Prime Minister Thaksin in early August and Deputy Prime Minister Chidchai a few weeks later), there is no reason to believe Sondhi's trip is related to the others. MFA's explanation is plausible given the number of significant security-related issues that exist between Thailand and Burma. Nevertheless, in conversation with Kallayana, Poloff observed that the frequency of high-level visitors seemed to contradict the message that the RTG is delivering to the international community - that Thailand is fed up with the lack of progress toward democracy in Burma and that 'business as usual' cannot continue until the regime takes some meaningful steps forward. The recent series of visits seems to indicate that 'business as usual' is exactly what Thailand is conducting with Burma. Kallayana offered no response to this observation.  
ARVIZU